

Writing

Writing is a complex process that allows writers to explore thoughts and ideas, and to make them visible and concrete. Writing and thinking are interwoven. Thinking is the foundation of writing and, because thinking is central to learning, students who are able to make their thought processes concrete through writing enhance learning capabilities.

Writing encourages thinking and learning for the following reasons:

1. Writing motivates communication.	Writing is a way of crossing the boundaries of time and culture, reaching those not present when the piece is written. Writing generates discussion through peer conferences or sharing activities.
2. Writing focuses and extends thought.	Writers must think to decide what to say and how to say it (e.g., organize thoughts, make word choices, add or delete ideas) and identify audience, purpose, and point of view. Writing encourages the development of more complex thought as ideas are analyzed and evaluated.
3. Writing makes thought available for reflection.	When thought is written down, ideas can be reconsidered, added to, and rearranged.

Writing is most likely to encourage thinking and learning when:

- Students view writing as a process.

By recognizing that writing is a recursive process and that every writer uses the process in a different way, students experience less pressure to “get it right the first time” and are more willing to experiment, revise, and edit.

- Students decide what to write about and have their own reasons for writing.

By choosing topics from students’ own experiences and interests, students get a sense of ownership; this sense of ownership promotes commitment and continuing interest. When students determine their own audience and

purpose for writing, students are compelled to find a way to write appropriately and effectively.

- Students talk as a part of their writing process.

From pre-writing to final draft, talking about their writing is central to students learning about their writing abilities and learning from the writing of others.

- Students write frequently and regularly.

Regular and frequent practice is necessary to becoming an effective writer.

(Adapted from Haley-James, 1982. Used with permission of the National Council of Teachers of English.)

The Writing Process

“The process approach to writing focuses upon the exploration and awareness of what writers actually do and what choices they make when they write” (*Saskatchewan Education*, 1989, p. 23). Teachers and students who view writing as a process recognize the following:

- Writing is recursive in nature; the writer moves within the process as necessary, perhaps from pre-writing to drafting, then back to pre-writing again, then forward to editing and back to drafting before polishing a piece for sharing or publication.
- Both the process and product of writing should be assessed and evaluated, allowing students and teachers to focus on and assess the learning that takes place during writing, rather than trying to ascertain what has been learned from the finished product only.
- Writing abilities are largely acquired by practice. While instruction may be required about some writing skills and knowledge, it must be conducted within the context of students’ writing and should not be broken into isolated sub-skills, which are less likely to transfer to the students’ writing. (It should also be kept in mind that many writers attribute their skill to frequent and varied reading.)
- Encouraging students to express their ideas and meaning in the form of whole “text” is preferable to focusing upon single, isolated parts of language.
- Creating meaning takes time and cannot be done on command.

- Although writing is a solitary activity for most writers, the social aspects of collaboration make writing partners appropriate for Middle Level students. For some students, however, writing will always be private and solitary, and teachers should be sensitive to this when planning group activities.

During the writing process, students engage in pre-writing, planning, drafting, and post-writing activities. The writing process is described in the paragraphs that follow.

Pre-Writing (BEFORE): A Place to Start

Pre-writing, the first phase of the writing process, begins long before the writer puts thoughts into writing. The experiences, observations, and interactions that students have prior to entering the classroom have an impact upon what they write and how they write it. Within the classroom, pre-writing prompts and activities can be integrated into the writing process by teachers as scaffolds to help students generate ideas for writing and to practise the thinking skills inherent in the activity.

To initiate thinking and generate possible writing topics, it is important for students to explore ideas for writing topics using a variety of pre-writing strategies such as the following:

- brainstorming
- constructing thought webs and graphic organizers, using software or other tools
- interviewing a person knowledgeable about the topic
- observing nature and other daily events
- engaging in peer or teacher-student discussions and conferences
- listening to music
- drawing on dreams and other images
- reading about and researching the topic
- free writing or timed free writing about the topic
- viewing pictures, movies, documentaries, and other forms of visual text
- listing and categorizing information
- responding to a variety of texts
- role playing and using other drama techniques
- asking the 5Ws – who, what, where, when, and why.

Pre-writing prompts or activities planned by the teacher can serve as writing scaffolds for inexperienced writers who have difficulty accessing their own feelings, ideas, experiences, and knowledge. Students who have a place to start are more motivated to continue developing their ideas and own writing voices.

After students have generated some ideas, students must decide what they will say about their chosen topic. Students develop an initial plan for the product they will compose. As they do so, they consider the purpose, audience, point of view, and format because these elements have implications for both the planning and the drafting of the written product. Some purposes for pre-writing activities are as follows.

To develop an initial plan for drafting:

Using such structures as outlines, story frames, diagrams, charts, and concept webs, students organize the information they have generated during pre-writing.

To consider purpose:

Writers write to express ideas, feelings, and opinions, and students must ask themselves, “What is my purpose for writing this piece?” Some purposes for student writing are:

- to express personal feelings or viewpoints
- to imagine “What if ...?”
- to entertain and/or amuse
- to describe
- to inform or explain
- to persuade or convince
- to request
- to inquire or question
- to clarify thinking.

To consider audience:

Writers consider for whom they are writing, and students must ask themselves, “Who is my intended audience?” Some possible audiences are:

- familiar, known audiences such as friends, peers, family, and teachers
- extended, known audiences such as community, student body, and local media
- extended, unknown audiences such as wider range of mass media and other publications.

To consider point of view:

Writers must determine which point of view their ideas or information will express, so students need to ask themselves, “Who is telling this story/describing the events?” Some points of view for student consideration are:

- physical point of view (i.e., where is the narrator in relation to the action?)
- objective and subjective point of view (i.e., what emotional involvement does the narrator have in relation to the situation?)

- personal point of view (i.e., who is the narrator of the story?). The narrator may take a first person, third person, or an all-knowing omniscient point of view.

To decide what information will be gathered and how it will most effectively be gathered:

- Students who decide that they need to conduct interviews or go on field trips to gather information should construct a list of questions, while students who require library research need to decide the types of resources and references to consult.

To consider format:

- Students use audience and purpose to determine format and genre. They have the opportunity to write in a variety of narrative, descriptive, expository, persuasive, script, and poetic formats.

Drafting (DURING): A Time to Explore

At this point in the process, the emphasis is on content and meaning rather than on mechanics and conventions. This is the time for writers to get down their ideas and thoughts, composing rough drafts based upon pre-writing and planning activities and considerations. As writers compose, they begin to determine what to include and exclude, and make initial decisions about how these ideas will be organized. The following points describe the main purposes of drafting activities.

To produce a first, rough draft:

- Students record their ideas rapidly in order to capture the essence of what students have to say.
- Students make little or no attempt to revise or edit.
- Students explore a point of view and initial tone.
- Students focus on talking to the reader.

To write subsequent drafts:

- Redrafting is often accomplished by crossing out, adding, and rearranging ideas.
- Word processing programs enable students to add, delete, and rearrange portions of text efficiently.
- By reflecting upon their own writing and through conferences with peers and the teacher, students receive constructive feedback and support that help to shape their writing.

To revise the draft for content and clarity of meaning:

- Students reorganize and sequence relevant ideas and add or delete details as students strive to make their meaning clear.

- Revisions can be made to words, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole piece (e.g., the writer may decide that the ideas would have more impact as poetry instead of prose).
- Rereading and reflecting upon their own work helps students to clarify meaning.
- Writing conferences with the teacher and peers about ideas and meaning can assist revision.

To revise the draft for mechanical and conventional concerns that detract from and obscure meaning:

- Students edit for accuracy and intent as well as for obvious convention issues including usage, sentence structure, and word choice.

To focus purpose, audience, and point of view and to confirm appropriateness of format:

- These variables, which were considered during the planning stage, are confirmed and used to shape the draft.

To confer with peers and the teacher:

- Writing conferences are useful because they provide an immediate audience for trying out ideas.
- A set of questions or a checklist can be used to assist writers and conference partners as they strive to help the writers make meaning clear. Some suggestions for scaffolds at the drafting stage include the following:
 - Post the major stages of the writing process (pre-writing, planning, drafting, post-writing) and brief information about each so that students can determine where they are at any time in the process.
 - Help students develop criteria or tips for writing a particular genre or format (e.g., poem, short story, script, letter), then post these on a bulletin board for reference as students write.
 - Set up a section of the classroom as a writing reference area and make available language resources such as dictionaries, thesauri, and language study texts. Encourage students to use these as needed individually or with peers and the teacher.

Post-drafting and Revising (AFTER): Preparing to Go Public

When students have an authentic audience and purpose, they want to rework their written drafts, polishing them for presentation or publication. Going public means taking a huge risk; the student's self-esteem is on the line, so the decision about how and with whom to share the writing must include the student writer. Teachers may encourage students to share certain pieces or determine the number of

pieces that students are required to share or publish within a set time period. Some purposes for post-drafting activities are listed below.

To prepare a final, polished draft:

Students proofread for accuracy and correctness as well as appearance. Students write in legible handwriting or use a word processing program to prepare a polished written work.

Some suggestions for post-writing scaffolds include the following:

- Discuss or develop with students criteria for polished pieces. Post these criteria or provide them as handouts for students to refer to as needed.
- Provide opportunities for students to use computer word processing programs to create final drafts.
- Have students share their final compositions with classmates or with others in the community such as younger children or elderly people.
- Post or publish students' work in the classroom and provide opportunities, when appropriate, for students to submit to publishers outside the classroom.

To decide if and how the written work will be shared or published:

Sharing provides students with an immediate audience. Some examples include the author's chair, which provides opportunity for students to share their writing aloud with the whole class; sharing in small groups or with a partner; and using bulletin board space assigned to a specific genre or to a class of students. At times, students should be provided with opportunities to decide if students wish to share their written work, and whether they will share in pairs, in small groups, with the whole class, or with a relevant community audience that has a particular interest in the work.

- Students may choose to publish their writing in such formats as:
 - class booklets
 - school or local newspapers
 - yearbook
 - writing contests
 - magazines (e.g., *On the Horizon*)
 - e-zines.

To decide if the written work will be placed in the student's assessment and evaluation portfolio:

Teachers can negotiate with students to generate guidelines about the number and variety of pieces that students are required to place in their portfolios for assessment and evaluation purposes. Contracts

may be useful to address individual student needs and abilities. Students should be involved in making choices about which of the students' written pieces become part of personal portfolios.

The Language Cues and Conventions in Written Composition

Effective writers consider and attend to the language cues and conventions before, during, and after composing. Writers need to keep each of the language cueing systems in mind:

- The pragmatic cues and conventions as writers consider the audience and purpose, and the level of language that would be appropriate in the communication.
- The textual cues and conventions as writers choose a type of text to write and organize their ideas into an appropriate format within that text. In addition, writers need to ensure that their ideas are connected using the appropriate transitional words.
- The syntactical cues and conventions as writers craft sentences of varying patterns, lengths, and complexity to achieve particular purposes.
- The semantic and lexical cues and conventions as writers choose their words carefully and consider their denotation and connotation, and the effect they will have on the audience.
- The graphophonic aspects of words as writers spell words correctly.
- The other cues and conventions that ensure compositions are effective including handwriting legibility, spacing, layout, and other visual cues and conventions.

Supporting the Writing Strand

It is important to create an atmosphere that allows and encourages students to feel safe taking risks in order to develop a community of writers who support each other and share with each other (the teacher is also a part of this community). Let students help set guidelines and rules to make the environment safe (e.g., no put-downs).

Desks can be arranged in clusters or tables can be used to accommodate four to six students. On a specified shelf, resources can be provided that assist students as they write (e.g., dictionaries, language study texts, writing models, and samples of student writing). Areas of the classroom can be designated for specific activities (e.g., peer conferences, writing and publishing tasks).

The teacher plays an interactive role and builds scaffolds as needed. The teacher models the

various writing formats and conventions of the writing process, and provides the needed help as each student is writing.

Middle Level English language arts teachers can support the writing strand by:

1. making writing a natural and integral part of each unit
2. modelling and discussing effective writing behaviours and strategies
3. planning lessons that ensure students achieve the outcomes for the writing strand
4. supporting and guiding students as they develop writing skills and strategies.

Each of these four points is described more fully in the paragraphs that follow.

1. Make writing a natural and integral part of each unit.

Students need to use and explore a wide variety of forms and to understand how they are structured. Recipes, for example, are different from poems or letters; stories are different than scripts. Middle Level students need to write across functions and forms. In order to do so, students need models and modelling. Students benefit from exploring a variety of models before using a particular form. Students can, for example, read a poem and then write their own poems using the form and a similar idea or theme that was expressed in the model poem.

Writing Frames

Writing frames help students understand the form requirements.

A Sample Expository (Explanatory) Paragraph Writing Frame

1. Decide on a topic, purpose, and audience.
2. List the main steps or points that you feel you need to explain in an order that is logical.
3. Start your paragraph with a topic sentence or introductory sentence. Sometimes a sentence or two may be used to catch the reader's attention before you write your actual topic sentence.
4. Select the signal words that will help you indicate order (e.g., first, next, finally).
5. Expand your steps or points into sentences, adding whatever explanations are necessary.
6. Write a good closing sentence to end your paragraph.

Explanatory Paragraph Checklist

- Is the topic sentence clearly worded?
- Are the steps or points in the correct order?
- Are the steps or points clear and easy to follow?

- Did you use the best signal words or are there better ones?
- Does the paragraph have a good closing sentence to let you know the paragraph is ended?

A Sample Cinquain Writing Frame

Line 1: one word (noun) giving the poem's subject
Line 2: two words (adjectives) describing the subject
Line 3: three words (verbs) describing actions associated with the subject
Line 4: four words expressing feelings or thoughts about the subject
Line 5: one word (noun) giving a synonym for the subject.

Finally, help students communicate their ideas in a variety of forms in each unit of study. A sample of possible writing forms that might be explored is found on page 13.

2. Model and discuss effective writing behaviours and strategies.

As a member of the community of writers, the teacher also writes and shares his/her writing with the students. The teacher should not just talk about the writing process but model (demonstrate) it using the chalkboard, chart paper, overhead projector, white board, or other tool. Talking, problem solving, and working through the steps and processes that a writer might use to write for a particular purpose in a particular form for a particular audience help students understand the strategies that effective writers use. As the students watch, listen, question, and suggest, the teacher can explain the various decisions that are being made and how to attend to the conventions of writing (e.g., starting a paragraph, starting a sentence, choosing the right word).

Note:

Guiding students to express themselves in written texts is a major challenge at all levels and in all areas of study. The phases of the writing process need to be taught and practised. This does not happen in one lesson or in one grade level. It is developmental and continuous. It requires knowledgeable teachers to help students grow in an environment that requires risk taking and support.

Strategies Students Can Use Before Drafting

What before drafting activities and strategies stimulate the students' interests, prior knowledge and experiences, and help students consider where to get ideas and information?

Students need strategies to:

- consider a possible message
- consider the purpose and audience(s)
- consider specific ideas and information that might be included
- consider possible form
- collect and focus the ideas and information
- plan and organize for drafting.

In the before phase, teachers consider:

- What is the task? Is it reasonable, feasible, and realistic?
- What prior thinking and experiences should the students have had?
- What is the time frame for the task? What resources, if any, are needed?
- What criteria will students be given (or generate with you) for evaluation?
- What mini-lessons are needed in this phase?

Strategies to Use During Drafting

What strategies enable students to get their ideas and information into a draft format that can be reviewed, expanded, and enhanced? Students need to have strategies to:

- create drafts and experiment with possible product(s)
- use language and its conventions to construct meaning
- self-monitor, self-correct, and use a variety of fix-up strategies
- confer with others.

In the during phase, teachers consider:

- What amount of time (either in or out of class) do the students need?
- Do the students have an opportunity to generate more than one draft?
- What provisions are made for students to give and receive feedback on their drafts?
- What mini-lessons are needed in this phase?

Strategies to Use After Drafting

What strategies help students review and revise their message and share it with an audience? Students need strategies to:

- revise for meaning, organization, sentence structure and flow, word choice, usage, mechanics, and appearance
- polish and share the final product with the intended audience(s)
- assess and evaluate success.

In the after phase, teachers consider:

- Will students have adequate time to revise their work?
- What specific activities or guidelines help students in their revisions?
- How will students be motivated to genuinely rethink and reshape their work (not just recopy)?
- How will students receive feedback?
- What mini-lessons are needed in this phase?

Students need time, guidance, and coaching in each phase of the writing process. When students write, they must “fit what they know to the needs of another person” and to the constraints of their purpose and form (Flower & Hayes, 1981). They must attend not only to “what” to say but also “how” to say it. As a result, students must:

- employ a wide range of strategies as students represent, speak, and write
- use different process elements to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes
- apply their knowledge of language structures and conventions to create print and non-print texts
- adjust their use of visual, spoken, and written language (including the language registers and conventions) to communicate effectively with their intended audience(s) for different purposes.

Key Questions When Writing

Middle Level students can learn to ask key questions such as the following before, during, and after writing.

Some Questions for Students to Consider Before Writing.

Do I:

- consider why I am going to write (purpose, audience, point of view, occasion)
- think about what message I want to communicate
- know what form (e.g., poem, narrative) I am going to use and how I am going to organize my ideas in that form?

Some Questions for Students to Consider During Drafting.

Do I:

- select and develop ideas from my pre-writing into a first draft
- focus my purpose, audience, point of view, and confirm appropriateness of format
- write subsequent drafts for clarity of meaning (e.g., add, delete, rearrange, or expand ideas)?

Some Questions for Students to Consider After Drafting.

Do I:

- write a final, polished draft in legible handwriting or use a word processing program
- edit for content and organization
- proofread for usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation
- decide if and how the work will be shared and/or published?

Writing and Plagiarism

Middle Level students need help understanding that copying someone else's work word for word or "borrowing" someone else's ideas or language is plagiarism. Students need to learn how to borrow ideas honestly and how to acknowledge each and every source. To help Middle Level students avoid plagiarism, teachers can:

- design writing assignments with clear and specific expectations and models
- support students in using their own words and finding their own "voice" in writing
- provide adequate instruction on how to incorporate others' ideas into own writing by modelling how to quote directly, paraphrase acceptably, and cite sources using an in-text method of citation
- teach students how to provide a list of references
- give students enough time to do an assignment and to attend to each phase of the writing process.

3. Plan lessons that ensure students achieve the outcomes for the writing strand.

Asking students to simply "tell" something or "write" a paragraph or poem usually does not result in effective, meaningful communication. Teachers must create clear, focused, and inviting assignments that give students a clear reason for communicating to a particular audience.

Teachers need to give students meaningful and adequate **prompts**. Whenever possible, these prompts should help the students know the answers to the following questions (RAFTS):

R (Role): Who am I? What is my role?

A (Audience): To whom am I communicating?
Should I use a formal or informal stance?

F (Format): Which format should I use while communicating?

T (Topic): What is the topic? Is it sufficiently focused?

S (Strong Verb) (purpose): What am I trying to do in this piece (e.g., convince, request, prove, complain, persuade, pretend, entertain)?

For example, "as a Grade 8 student, write a letter convincing one member of your community that he or she needs to produce less waste."

As students become more independent, they can determine and create their own RAFTS (Adler & Vandeventer, 1989). The following chart illustrates a few of the possibilities.

Topic: What am I writing about?			
Possible Roles	Possible Audiences	Possible Purposes	Possible Formats
Self Parent Teacher Character Coach	Self Editor Immigrant Architect Author	Narrate Support Inform Deny Brag	Journal Letter Script Report Poem

When Middle Level students approach writing tasks, students need to draw upon a "tool kit" of **cognitive strategies** that can be used in the planning, drafting, revising, and presenting phases. Teachers in every grade and area of study need to help students use these strategies. Students need to learn how to use a process and need to be coached through the phases of the writing tasks.

With good modelling and coaching, most students can create their own compositions using some key knowledge, skills, and strategies associated with composing. During the process, students can learn to use the language conventions for identified purposes.

Mini-lessons

Most writing lessons involve mini-lessons, sustained writing time, peer and teacher conferences, and sharing. The decision about what to teach in a mini-lesson depends upon the students' needs and interests.

Planning

Different types of communication require different pre-writing strategies. Teachers have to provide adequate modelling and allow sufficient time for students to generate ideas, focus them, and develop a plan. In this phase, teachers have to consider carefully the assignment and where the students are

going to get their ideas (e.g., experiences, interview, discussion, reading, brainstorming). Murray (1982) believes that 70% or more of time should be spent in the planning phase.

In the pre-writing phase, teachers:

- help students consider a possible message (mini-lessons include creating maps, storyboarding, clustering/webbing)
- help students consider their purpose and audience(s) (e.g., exchanging information, persuasion)
- help students consider specific ideas that might be included (mini-lessons include focusing key ideas and supporting details)
- help students consider possible forms
- help students plan and organize for drafting (possible mini-lessons include planning and organizing).

Drafting

Writing is a generating process and students approach their first drafts in different ways. Some students formulate a clear plan or outline while others simply dive in and begin to create. The key during this phase is to ensure students capture their ideas as quickly and efficiently as possible, using drafting strategies that work best.

In the drafting phase, teachers:

- teach students how to create drafts and experiment with possible forms (possible mini-lessons include creating several leads; focused “quickwrites,” keeping focus on content; adding, deleting, rearranging ideas and details).
- teach students how to use language and its conventions to construct students’ message (mini-lessons include levels of usage; using the appropriate language including tone, style, and language for intended audience(s) and purpose; writing beginnings and endings; writing effective and varied sentences; using strong verbs).
- teach students how to self-monitor, self-correct, and use a variety of fix-up strategies (possible mini-lessons include double spacing, pausing and rereading, crossing out, inserting, starting over, pausing and reflecting).
- teach students how to confer with others and revise work with writing partners (possible mini-lessons include conferencing, giving constructive feedback, making changes based on feedback).

Revising and Presenting

Revision occurs during the drafting stage and whenever the student is ready to polish and get something ready for sharing. Helping students use

and identify specific revision focuses that truly result in more than superficial fix-ups is critical in this phase.

In the revising phase, teachers:

- teach students how to revise for meaning, organization, sentence structure and flow, word choice, usage, mechanics, and appearance (possible mini-lessons include making substantive rather than minor changes, the revision triangle, layered revision, using the pass system, check and question marks, author reads aloud to listener, reader reads author’s paper aloud to author, proofreading backwards)
- teach students how to polish and share/present the final product with/to the intended audience (possible mini-lessons include concept of author’s chair, all about the author page, reading composition aloud, displaying, submitting for publication, a “read-around” party).

Graves (1994, 2004) notes that teachers need to listen to, observe, and note what students are doing with the language. He also notes that teachers need to know when to step in, when to teach, and when to expect more of their students. Teachers need to be proactive in teaching students how to revise and how to spell, as well as teaching other valuable conventions and important tools that writers use to revise and polish their texts. “There is a time and place for brevity and coding” but students also need to know how to write in a more standard fashion.

Middle Level teachers can help students keep the focus on revising for ideas first by making content the repetitive most important aspect of revision.

A Sample Revision Frame and Checklist

Step 1: Attend to Content

- ___ Am I saying what I want and/or need to say?
- ___ Are my ideas sufficiently explained or described?
- ___ Are there some gaps in my thinking/writing?

Step 2: Attend to Organization

- ___ Are my ideas in the best order?
- ___ Does each paragraph begin effectively (e.g., start with a humorous anecdote, a personal experience, or point of the paragraph)?

Step 3: Attend to Usage, Sentence Structure, Word Choice, and Mechanics

Usage

- ___ Is standard language used?

Sentences

- ___ Are all the sentences clear?
- ___ Are there any sentence fragments or run-ons?
- ___ Does each verb agree with its subject?

- ☐ Are verb tenses consistent and correct?
- ☐ Have double negatives been avoided?
- ☐ Have frequently confused words (such as affect and effect) been used correctly?

Spelling

- ☐ Are all words, including names, spelled correctly?

Punctuation and Capitalization

- ☐ Are commas used correctly?
- ☐ Does every sentence end with the correct punctuation mark?

Handwriting

- ☐ Are the letters legible?
- ☐ Are there appropriate spaces between letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs?

The **mechanics** of written language are important but need to be kept in context and taught in an integrated and meaningful way.

Within the framework of a balanced language arts program, Middle Level students need explicit instruction to learn to **spell** (Graham & Harris, 1994). Poor spelling can influence perceptions about a student's competence as a writer and interfere with the execution of other composing processes (Graham, 1990; Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Goleman, 1982). Having to switch attention during composing to mechanics, such as considering how to spell a particular word, can cause a student to forget something s/he had planned to say but had not yet written down. Difficulties mastering spelling skills can lead children to avoid writing and to develop a mind set that they cannot write (Graham, 1999).

Handwriting is a basic communication skill that allows students to communicate with ease and fluency. "Learning a consistent system of printing and cursive writing is as essential as it ever was, especially for young writers ..." (Allen, 2003, p. 6). The lack of an automatic command of handwriting can inhibit students' abilities to write. Students who master the mechanics of handwriting are happier to write, more expressive, and do a better job in content (Olsen, 2003). According to Hoskisson and Tompkins (1987, p. 444), "Handwriting is best taught in separate periods of direct instruction (isolation) and teacher supervised practice. As soon as skills are taught, they are applied in real-life writing activities within the classroom (integration)."

4. Support and guide students as they develop writing skills and strategies.

During most of sustained writing time, the teacher should be circulating throughout the classroom, conducting brief informal conferences, and providing instructional scaffolds for each student as needed. As well, the teacher's role is to build in time for

extended student-teacher conferences and for peer conferences.

Checklists

Checklists may be helpful to students as they reflect upon their own writing and as they confer with peers and the teacher. Conference checklists serve as scaffolds as students practise talking about writing. As well, conference checklists inform the teacher about the nature of peer interaction during writing conferences.

Middle Level students also benefit from writing task guidelines. For example,

A Sample Student Writing Task Checklist

Task: Writing a Fable

Writer:

Prompt: You are a children's writer. Write a fable using animals as characters to teach an important moral to an Elementary Level student.

Have students note the "Date Completed" for each of the following tasks.

Pre-Writing

- ☐ Read five fables and took notes in my reading log
- ☐ Drew a story cluster of one fable
- ☐ Identified the characteristics of fables
- ☐ Brainstormed possible morals for a fable
- ☐ Planned a fable using a story cluster map

Drafting

- ☐ Marked paper as ROUGH DRAFT and wrote on every other line using story cluster map
- ☐ Allowed a cooling-off period
- ☐ Read first draft and noted possible changes and revision to story
- ☐ Wrote a second draft using suggestions
- ☐ Participated in a writing group and compared my fable with list of characteristics of fables
- ☐ Made at least one revision

Revising

- ☐ Had a conference with teacher
- ☐ Shared draft with a peer using the P (Praise) Q (Question) P (Polish) as a guide
- ☐ Edited fable using feedback and any additional ideas
- ☐ Proofread with a partner and corrected any spelling or other errors
- ☐ Wrote the final copy in my best handwriting
- ☐ Added a title and an illustration

Sharing

- ___ Shared fable with two other people
(Person 1: _____ Person 2: _____)
- ___ Posted fable on classroom bulletin board

Writing Workshop

Setting aside a block of time for writing by establishing a writing workshop can accommodate the messy nature of writing and give the support that many Middle Level students require. Assigning a set time period, perhaps one day a week, for students to write in class and giving support to individuals and small groups of students during that time can make a difference. In the writing workshop approach, most of the time (e.g., 30 minutes) is reserved for writing or writing-related activities such as pre-writing, drafting, researching, conferring, or preparing for publication. Time can also be reserved for mini-lessons (5-10 minutes), a class survey or status check to keep track of the students' work and progress (2-3 minutes), and sharing sessions (5 minutes). The teacher's role is to serve as a writing mentor and to act as a roving facilitator by helping each student make the most out of each writing project.

The students' success or failure in a workshop depends on their abilities to manage time effectively and to write. In the course of the writing workshop, students should be working through the phases of the writing process and may be:

- pre-writing by talking with one another about writing ideas and possibilities
- choosing a topic and focus that fit the assignment or interest students
- exploring a topic and making plans
- working alone on drafting and redrafting
- working in small editorial groups
- conferencing with the teacher about specific writing problems
- helping one another with problems
- revising and preparing for publication
- reading and sharing finished writing with small groups or the whole class.

Writing workshops can focus on both writing for an assignment and writing for personal reasons.

Self-reflection helps students to improve their own writing as well as to formulate specific questions that can provide a focus for the peer or teacher writing conference. A list of questions such as the following may assist students as they reflect upon their own written work. These questions may be provided by the teacher or developed with students.

As you write ...

Ask yourself some of these questions (or have a conference partner ask them after reading the writing-in-progress):

- How do I feel about what I have written so far?
- What is good that I can enhance?
- Is there anything about it that concerns me, does not fit, or seems wrong?
- What surprises me? Where is it leading?
- What is my purpose?
- What is the one most important thing that I am trying to convey?
- How can I build this idea? Are there places that I wander away from my key idea?
- Who is my audience?
- What might my readers think as they read through this piece?
- What questions will they ask?
- What will be their response to the different parts? To the whole?
- What might I do next? Would it help to try another draft? Talk to a peer? Talk to the teacher? Check a resource book? Reread it aloud/silently? Read a published example of this genre? Try the idea in a new genre? Keep on writing?

Conferences

A writing conference is a conversation about writing – the author's ideas, structures, successes, and difficulties. Conferences, in pairs or small groups, may or may not include the teacher. Writing conferences can take place at any time during the writing process. They may last only a few seconds as writers check on a certain writing concept or concern, or conferences may be extended conversations several minutes in length. To encourage effective writing conferences, Middle Level teachers should establish an environment in which students feel it is safe to take risks and where classroom procedures for conferencing are agreed upon by teacher and students.

Purposes of writing conferences include:

- to encourage writers to reflect, examine, and evaluate their own writing – to “re-see” it
- to assist writers in improving the quality of work
- to engage students in talking in order to learn from themselves and others.

It is important that students recognize that conferencing about others' writing does not mean that they are expected to fix it. Only the writer has the right and responsibility to make revisions and

clarify meaning. Questions are often the most helpful feedback, as they lead writers to reflect upon their meaning and craft.

Teacher-Student Conferences

While students are writing, the teacher can circulate throughout the classroom, conducting informal conferences. During such conferences, the teacher spends only a few minutes with each student, asking questions or building needed scaffolds so that students can continue writing. At other times, the teacher can hold longer, extended conferences. Effective questions can help the writer and lead to improved written work. Questions can help writers to reflect upon their work:

- What is the part that you like best?
- Does it say what you want it to say?
- What do you mean by ...?
- Where/when does your story take place?
- Are you satisfied with the beginning/ending? Why or why not?
- Does this sentence/word/phrase make sense to you?
- What reaction do you want your reader to have?
- How do you see your ideas being rearranged or changed? Why?

Peer Conferences

Peer conferences can be an important part of the writing process as well as a useful teaching strategy. During a peer conference, students are both teachers and learners who:

- write more because they have an immediate audience
- are more involved in and responsible for learning because they are making choices and decisions about own work
- are able to retain ownership of written work because they determine if and when to make use of suggestions from others.

Teachers can assist students by providing expectations for peer conferencing sessions. It can be useful to involve students in setting some of the expectations. The following examples may be discussed with students and posted for reference, or may be adapted for student handouts.

Steps for a Peer Writing Conference

1. The writer decides how the written work will be shared. Will it be:
 - read silently by the conference partner(s)?
 - read aloud by the writer?
 - read aloud by the conference partner(s)?
 - a combination of the above?
2. The writer identifies what aspects of the written work are the focus of the conference (e.g., the beginning paragraph, figurative language).
3. The conference partner states at least:
 - one thing he/she considers that the writer has done well
 - one thing he/she especially likes
 - one suggestion that addresses the focus of the conference as identified by the writer. (It is useful to have students complete a written conference sheet to guide their responses, especially when the process is new to them.)
4. The writer retains the right to the written work and is responsible for making the final decision about any changes.

Guidelines for Successful Peer Conferencing

1. Help others identify or clarify problems, but remember only the writers can solve those problems.
2. Observe and share feelings, avoiding judgement as much as possible.
3. Be brief and clear, dealing with immediate concerns and the effect they have on you here and now.
4. Listen closely to the writer's concerns and consider these concerns when reading or listening to the written work.
5. Regarding the written piece itself, the conference partner(s) consider(s):
 - a. the beginning:
Is it interesting? Does it grab your attention?
 - b. the middle:
Does it leave out important details?
 - c. the ending:
Is it satisfying?
 - d. the language:
Is it clear and easy to understand? Is it appropriate to the writer's purpose, audience, and format?
 - e. the focus or key idea:
Does the piece have a clear focus? Do all elements of the piece relate to the focus? To each other?

Tips for a Successful Proofreading Conference

Paragraphs: Is there a new paragraph for each new idea or for each new speaker? Does one paragraph lead logically into the next paragraph?

Sentences: Do they end with full-stop punctuation? Is there subject-verb agreement? Are they varied in length and complexity?

Standard Usage: Read the piece aloud to yourself or a peer. Does the language sound correct? Check a language handbook or talk to another person if you are uncertain.

Spelling: When proofreading a piece, if a word looks misspelled, try to spell the word in different ways: sound it out, check the dictionary, or ask a peer. Then record the word on your Personal Spelling List for future reference.

Punctuation: Read the piece aloud to decide if the punctuation creates pauses and stops that sound right. Check another piece of literature or a language handbook/resource to determine appropriate punctuation.

Capitalization: Check for capital letters at the beginnings of sentences and for proper nouns.

Be honest and fair when conferencing! Remember, it is your job to help your partner become a better writer.

- emphasize that all students have noteworthy ideas and experiences about which to write
- demonstrate that writing involves decision making and that peers are valuable resources during the process
- help students recognize that writers should be able to give reasons for the choices made regarding what and how writers communicate.

Opportunities to Share Writing

Most writing is meant to be heard or read by an audience. Writers are their own first audience, but they also require the genuine response of others. Teachers may wish to establish regular sharing times (e.g., the end of each class period). This encourages students to try out new ideas for writing or sharing.

The **Authors' Circle** (Graves & Hansen, 1983) is a strategy that provides opportunities for students to read their compositions to a small group of peers or, if appropriate, to the entire class. Listeners react to the writing, ask questions, and offer constructive comments and responses. Authors' Circles provide opportunities to:

- demonstrate that writing is more than a transaction between the student and teacher by extending students' sense of audience
- extend the skills of collaborative learning and peer conferencing and editing
- experience different styles of writing

Possible Writing Forms: A Sample Planning Chart

Possible Writing Experiences (Formats)	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6 (optional)
Accident Report						
Advertisement						
Advice column						
Apology						
Article						
Autobiography						
Ballad						
Biography						
Campaign speech						
Chapter of a novel						
Character analysis						
Character sketch						
Descriptive paragraph						
Dialogue						
Diary/journal						
Directions						
Ending						
Essay						
Eulogy						
Expository paragraph						
Fable or fairy tale						
Fact sheet						
Family history						
Game rules						
Greeting card						
Horoscope						
Instructions						
Interview						
Joke						
Legend						
Letter of complaint/inquiry						
Narrative paragraph						
News article						
Parable						
Personal experience story						
Persuasive paragraph						
Petition						
Poem						
Rap						
Recipe						
Reminiscence						
Report/research paper						
Review						
Script/short play						
Short story						
Song						
Sports column						
Summary						
Tall tale						
Want ad						
Wish list						

Sample Lesson Planning Guide for Writing

Outcome(s): (What will students learn and be able to do as a result of this activity?)

Assessment and Evaluation: (What do students already know and do as writers? What do students not know or do as writers? What evidence will demonstrate that students have achieved the outcome?)

Prompt: (What is the task? Is it clearly stated? Does the prompt draw on students' prior knowledge and experiences or pique students' interest in the topic?)

Pre-writing and Planning: (What pre-writing activities will help the students generate ideas for writing? What activities will help students to focus on the task and formulate a writing plan?)

Drafting: (What strategies can help students prepare their first draft? Do students have the opportunity and time to generate more than one draft?)

Revising: (What specific activities or guidelines will help students in their revisions? How will students be motivated to rethink and reshape their papers and not just recopy them?)

Sharing: (What provisions are made for students to give and receive feedback on their drafts and revisions? How can students share their final products with others?)

Sample Teacher Checklist to Support Writing

1. Do I model and share writing strategies?
 - ☐ develop students' explicit knowledge of the writing process and its recursive nature
 - ☐ introduce a variety of pre-writing, drafting, and revision strategies
2. Do I use mini-lessons to help students review or acquire writing skills or strategies or learn a specific language concept?
 - ☐ analyze what individuals and groups of students need to know and build on what they already know
 - ☐ provide short but focused direct instruction about a language concept, convention, format, or issue
3. Do I provide opportunities for students to write for a variety of purposes and audiences?
 - ☐ encourage students to express themselves
 - ☐ provide opportunities for students to describe, narrate, inform, and persuade
 - ☐ provide opportunities for students to reflect, clarify, and explore ideas
 - ☐ provide opportunities for students to entertain
4. Do I provide students with, and help them to use, a variety of tools to assist students during their writing?
 - ☐ provide language handbooks
 - ☐ provide dictionaries and thesauri
 - ☐ use literature as models
 - ☐ include peer learning activities
 - ☐ design activities for students to use word processing software and the Internet
5. Do I encourage and instruct students about how to use writing as a means of thinking, responding, and learning?
 - ☐ encourage students to collect writing ideas in journals (e.g., key phrases from Thanksgiving dinner, a quick sketch of geese flying in formation)
 - ☐ provide time for students to write about what they are thinking (e.g., write down one question you have about this topic)
 - ☐ allow students to review, think, and write about a topic again (e.g., write about how your ideas regarding this topic have changed throughout the unit and why)
 - ☐ model and encourage use of a variety of strategies including jotting notes, creating idea webs, researching, and designing outlines or overviews
 - ☐ provide opportunities for students to experiment with words and writing formats
6. Do I encourage students to use writing folders?
 - ☐ encourage students to use folders to sift, sort, and store pre-writing notes
 - ☐ encourage students to collect drafts for revision in writing folders
 - ☐ support students in collecting exemplary and polished work
7. Do I help students balance their attention to writing content, process, and product?
 - ☐ encourage students to generate ideas and say what students want to say
 - ☐ encourage students to use pre-writing, planning, drafting, conferencing, revising, editing, proofreading, sharing, and publishing strategies
 - ☐ encourage students to develop drafts into polished, finished compositions
8. Do I involve students in assessing writing practices and behaviours?
 - ☐ identify students' strengths and needs before, during, and after writing
 - ☐ consider peer, teacher, and self-assessments (e.g., peer and teacher conferences)
 - ☐ use checklists, rubrics, and anecdotal notes
 - ☐ use both holistic and analytical scoring
 - ☐ involve students in developing assessment criteria and determining evaluation weighting